

My experience amidst Covid-19

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Staff Reporter

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I came to China in September of last year for my Master's degree in International Communication. I am on a MOFCOM scholarship, set up by the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China in order to strengthen the communication and cooperation between China and other nations and enhance the capabilities especially of developing nations. This scholarship primarily sponsors younger and middle-aged government officials from recipient nations to pursue Master's and PhD degrees offered in English.

All alone in your room for more than 65 days now and more days to come. Who knows until when? No one.

It is all a bit touchy-feely, thanks but no thanks, I'd rather have tea to relax. For others, they can't take it, some went back to their countries of origin, some of us stayed.

The fear of contracting the virus at the airport and on flights kicked in, logistics, going and coming back, it is better to stay since my programme is only for a year, it is just a

few more months left. We are advised to stay indoors, our ambassador the other day tweeted that students should abide by the laws of the Chinese government and just stay where they are.

Singing daily doesn't make me better at playing the violin I bought online but that does not negate the joy of singing in my life. If I can find something that I can work into my daily practice and build into my life, that makes me less anxious, less stressed and less likely to become depressed, then hallelujah, bring it on!

If you can afford a therapist, by all means please do just that. Eat healthy and exercise, this remain the basis of a healthy life. I will never forget the two ladies that use to come at my room at the beginning of the outbreak to monitor temperature. Every time they ask in Chinese, if I have eaten, "Chi fan, chi fan?" she used her phone to translate, "how are you feeling today?" I said, "I think yesterday was better, today I don't know what's happening, I am thinking of going back to my country." Then she said, "You need to stand up, open your window for ventilation, take a shower, eat, a little exercise and you will be fine," she said with a smile.

Her message brought me hope, immediately I think of better, more hopeful times, retaining on the hard-earned wisdom to stay connected to that which matters, stand in good stead looking into a prosperous future, it helped me to focus on the now with a positive mind.

Coronavirus, while we feel it so close, we fear it so much too, it feels like it's in the air that we breathe and also attached to our fingers, everything that I touch, I monitor closely.

Everything that was once part of you becomes a potential source of contamination, including your phone and even your own body. Constantly washing one's hands, foods and almost everything before consumption has become a kind of obsession. Don't forget to sanitise your phone too. Moreover, protective facemasks have become a part of daily life. People do not go out without a mask; the authorities does not allow. A cough or a little chest discomfort triggers anxiety.

Threat

Coronavirus, to me, this is a highly infectious respiratory disease and it poses a threat to everyone in every society. We can all believe and testify that this came as a surprise that afflicted hundreds of thousands global citizens in 2020, and me and you are no exception.

At the beginning of the outbreak there was only one vegetable super market close to our school where we could stock up foods, until our school decided we were no longer going out at all, this was to prevent cross infections. Therefore, we resorted to buying everything online. Foods, masks and everything became really expensive and still are. Daily messages from social media came in from home, when are you coming home? Aren't you leaving China? People ask and probably think it is an easy decision to make. They do not know how emotional this is. Being alone in the midst of an epidemic, very far from your families and friends. I have seen how I and my colleague struggled at the beginning to get masks, some of the colleagues narrates how they wash and hang their masks by the heaters trying to disinfect them.

Most of the international students shared how nothing much is being done by their

governments to ensure their safety but everything was placed in the hands of the Chinese government. However, some countries have come to rescue their students by giving them extra stipends if not evacuating them.

From where I come from; Namibia, we believe in meeting the government half way, and in my own capacity I have reached out to the people in my circle to assist donate the little they could. A few people responded and I managed to buy and hand out to 21 students each a 500ml hand wash, five surgical masks, a pair of protective glasses goggles and 25 pairs of hand gloves) two pairs of goggles and a box of 50 gloves given to the front desk staffs on march 17. By this time our school has also started giving us food or fruits and masks in a week or two.

The biggest enemy is not the virus, but one's mental health. When I stayed in one room for over a month, without going outside that was horrible, a little later I started going to the stadium for runs and football, I would also take a walk around the school, for as long as you have a mask on and you don't go outside, everything will be fine. Sleeping patterns changed too from sleeping during the day and staying awake the whole night. The shift moved from eating three meals a day to only eating once in the evening.

Fearful

Paranoia kicked in and I started washing and sanitising everything I buy online including biscuit packets, plastic of bread or a bottle of soda. Trust me, I even tried washing a piece of cake, I just ran it through running water.

For the first days of the outbreak until two months later, I looked at the numbers of infections on my phone, I would read both domestic and foreign news and collect most updated information of the virus outbreak. It didn't end. The numbers grew until I lost track.

My colleague would ask, how are the statistics today, and I would say, I have stopped checking the statistics, it doesn't do me any good. Well, I resumed checking statistics again when the media started reporting that things are getting better.

I don't think anyone should say the outbreak is over, for me it is only the worst that seems to be over. We are still under lockdown in my school, in Beijing. And if you look at the statistics there are still a lot of people infected although the new cases have dropped drastically.

The coronavirus epidemic has reached deeper into our daily lives across the world, with a sweeping shutdown of all schools in China. I couldn't really focus while taking courses online, and I can't afford to waste anytime because my course will end soon, thesis and term papers need to be submitted.

From the look of things, the people outside China, especially Namibians didn't seem to really understand this virus. I would like to urge authorities and businesses to provide for those that cannot provide for themselves. The time is now to join hands and work in solidarity to fight this virus. Do not let your own people to suffer. Namibian students in China have already experienced the repercussion of lack of cohesion.

At the beginning of the outbreak, as if they were not going through enough, the Namibian students in China cried for help for evacuation and the people's comment and the authorities didn't help much but just added onto the stress.

Skyrocketing prices

Prices of goods went high drastically even after the Chinese government has warned businesses to keep prices low. Meanwhile, the Namibian embassy has promised to assist students affected so they could buy foods, masks and other supplies. About 30 students in Wuhan received their US\$220, but the rest of the students in mainland didn't receive their funds until the embassy issued a letter to the students that it was no longer going to give the support of US\$180 they had promised.

On an online meeting held on zoom, students described this as an emotional torture. "The lockdown continues, we have been holding on so strong and hoping for something as they promised, just to get such news. "We are still at the centre of it all. They should never do this again." This is just sad and emotionally draining. Why would you promise students such in time such as this and not deliver? It is heart-breaking that there's no even compassion from our own people, some students wrote on the platform.

I think the rapid spread of Covid-19 is an important reminder to all of us that global events are often indifferent to borders. It makes no sense making fun of it today because you think it is far from you, tomorrow might surprise you. After the outbreak of new crown pneumonia, the Chinese government immediately took strict measures to prevent and control it. The CPC Central Committee has set up a leading group to respond to the epidemic, releases information on the prevention and inform the world health organisation and regions in a timely manner.

All over the epidemic information were announced about the newly confirmed cases, and the authority announced outbreak protection measures. The scientific norms were taken as measures to relieve people's anxiety.

If you think about it, it is more like a war without smoke, not against each other but against the virus. The police is strict but didn't beat the people, the Chinese people and everyone in China were so cooperative to follow the government rule of wearing a mask and the community became advocates for "masks civilisation," adhering to the "do not travel, don't go out, don't gather at crowded places, stand one metre away from each other, stop wedding events, simplify funeral events, and work together to stop the spread of the virus".

China's initiative to combat the new crown pneumonia has received recognition from the international community, with various countries, international institutions and even ordinary people to express their support to China through various ways.

According to the latest report released by China's National Bureau of Statistics, in January and February, the peak of the outbreak in the country, the industrial output of the world's second-largest economy plummeted to the lowest point since 1998, and the unemployment rate soared to more than six percent, the highest on record. The suspension has pushed many businesses to near-bankruptcy, but as the quarantine measures have been loosened, many are preparing for a rebound in production.

Some products are not available on the market due to stockpiling. Therefore, the prices of the products rapidly increase every day

As life begins to return to normal, experts worry that there is still an underlying risk. There are worries that as soon as the expansive quarantine measures are lifted, China will be hit by a second wave of the infection, especially as the coronavirus is now a

global pandemic and imported cases outnumber local ones.

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